

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-10 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 ACDA-12 IO-13 TRSE-00 OMB-01
SMS-01 /123 W
-----121288 060958Z/10

R 060919Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6433
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
USINT HAVANA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ET, UR, PINT
SUBJECT: SOVIET MFA OFFICIAL DISCUSSES ETHIOPIA

SUMMARY: SOVIET MFA ETHIOPIAN DESK OFFICER STATES THAT

-- CUBAN PRESENCE IN ETHIOPIA IS NOT LIKELY TO
INCREASE, NOR IS IT LIKELY TO FALL SUBSTANTIALLY;
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-- THERE ARE NO CUBAN TROOPS IN ERITREA;
-- ERITREAN POPULATION IS NOW COOPERATING WITH THE
ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE. A TOTALLY MILITARY SOLUTION
TO THE ERITREAN PROBLEM IS NOT ADVISABLE; A
SOLUTION SHOULD INCORPORATE POLITICAL PROPOSALS
GRANTING SOME FORM OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY, PERHAPS

ON THE SOVIET MODEL. IN THE LONG RUN, THE ERITREAN DESIRE FOR AUTONOMY WILL FADE;

-- MOGADISCIO IS OPENLY AND MATERIALLY SUPPORTING THE WSLF IN THE OGADEN. IN EFFECT, WSLF IS A "COMMANDO ARM" OF THE SOMALI ARMY. COURSE OF TENSIONS IN OGADEN AND SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS WILL DEPEND HEAVILY ON BARRE'S SUCCESS IN OBTAINING ARMS ABROAD. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF CALLED ON SOVIET MFA COUNSELOR, THIRD AFRICAN DEPARTMENT, L. V. MIRONOV (HORN OF AFRICA SECTOR CHIEF), ON AUGUST 31 TO DISCUSS SOVIET VIEWS ON ETHIOPIA.

2. CUBAN PRESENCE: MIRONOV REPEATED STANDARD SOVIET LINE THAT SIZE AND NATURE OF CUBAN PRESENCE IS FOR CUBA AND ETHIOPIA TO DETERMINE. HE NEVERTHELESS PREDICTED THAT, WITH THE SOMALIS EXPELLED FROM THE OGADEN, THE NUMBER OF CUBANS IN ETHIOPIA IS NOT GOING TO INCREASE. HE VOICED HIS EXPECTATION THAT CUBAN PRESENCE IS ALSO NOT GOING TO DIMINISH SUBSTANTIALLY IN THE NEAR FUTURE. MIRONOV STATED HIS PERSONAL IMPRESSION THAT THERE ARE NO CUBAN TROOPS STATIONED IN ERITREA, ADDING THAT THE TWO MAIN ERITREAN SECESSIONALIST GROUPS HAVE PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED THIS.

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3. ERITREAN SITUATION: MIRONOV REITERATED WHAT SOVIET OFFICIALS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN TELLING OTHER DIPLOMATS HERE: THE CURRENT ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE IS SUCCEEDING. EXCEPT FOR A FEW TOWNS, ALL OF ERITREA HAS BEEN RECOVERED. THE ERITREAN POPULATION, IN CONTRAST TO ITS PREVIOUS BEHAVIOR, IS WELCOMING AND SUPPORTING THE ETHIOPIAN ADVANCE. MIRONOV ATTRIBUTED THIS TO ERITREAN PERCEPTION OF WHICH WAY THE WIND IS BLOWING (THE "PRACTICALITIES" OF THE SITUATION) AND TO WHAT HE ALLEGED TO BE ERITREAN RECOGNITION THAT THE "SECESSIONISTS" COULD PROVIDE ONLY PROMISES OF BENEFITS IN THE DISTANT FUTURE; THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT CAN PROVIDE BENEFITS NOW. IN THIS CONNECTION HE SAID ETHIOPIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE ALREADY FORMED "WORKERS COMMITTEES" IN LIBERATED AREAS. HE EXPECTED REFORMS WOULD FOLLOW.

4. MIRONOV THOUGHT THAT A PURELY MILITARY SOLUTION OF THE ERITREAN PROBLEM WOULD NOT BE ADVISABLE. HE RECOUNTED ERITREA'S PRE-1962 HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AS A SEPARATE ENTITY IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, CON-

CLUDING THAT, AT LEAST FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, SECTIONS OF THE ERITREAN POPULATION WOULD CONTINUE TO RESIST EFFORTS TO SUBJUGATE ERITREA BY FORCE. MIRONOV SAID SOVIET UNION SUPPORTS AN ERITREAN SOLUTION IN WHICH ERITREA IS FIRST AND FOREMOST RECOGNIZED AS PART OF THE "FRAMEWORK" OF ETHIOPIA. SECONDLY, HE CONTINUED, SOVIET UNION BELIEVES THAT A SETTLEMENT OF THE ERITREAN PROBLEM SHOULD INCORPORATE POLITICAL PROPOSALS. ASKED TO ELABORATE, HE REFERRED FAVORABLY TO THE 1976 ANNOUNCED NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAM OF WHICH (HE SAID) A MOST IMPORTANT PROVISION DEALT WITH THE GRANTING

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OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY TO CONSTITUENT PARTS OF ETHIOPIA. DESPITE PERSISTENT QUESTIONING, MIRONOV

CAREFULLY AVOIDED FURTHER COMMENT ON NATURE AND EXTENT OF SUCH AUTONOMY. HE DID STATE THAT ERITREA SHOULD BE GIVEN NO "SPECIAL" STATUS AS COMPARED TO OTHER REGIONS OF ETHIOPIA. TOO MUCH AUTONOMY WOULD RESULT IN DISCRIMINATION BY ONE OR TWO OF THE MAIN NATIONALITY GROUPS IN ERITREA AGAINST THE OTHER

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NATIONALITY GROUPS. EXCESSIVE AUTONOMY TO AN ERITREAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT WOULD ALSO COMPLICATE THE SITUATION OF A NUMBER OF NATIONALITY GROUPS IN ERITREA, SUCH AS THE AFARS, WHO SPREAD INTO NEIGHBORING REGIONS. ASKED WHETHER THE SOVIETS VIEW A FEDERATED STRUCTURE SUCH AS YUGOSLAVIA OR INDIA AS POSSIBLE MODEL FOR ETHIOPIA, HE RESPONDED THAT IT IS UP TO ETHIOPIA TO DECIDE WHETHER THE YUGOSLAV, INDIAN OR SOVIET MODEL WOULD BE PREFERABLE. MIRONOV THEN STATED THAT, IN HIS VIEW, ALTHOUGH SOME FORM OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY FOR ERITREA MAY BE CALLED FOR IN THE SHORT RUN, THE ERITREAN DESIRE FOR AUTONOMY WOULD FADE OVER THE LONG RUN.

5. MIRONOV DOWNPLAYED ARAB SUPPORT TO THE ERITREANS AND DENIED THAT SUCH SUPPORT HAS HARMED SOVIET RELATIONS WITH ARAB STATES. HE SAID THAT IRAQ AND SYRIAN SUPPORT (HE DID NOT MENTION LIBYA) IS A HOLD-OVER FROM THE MONARCHY PERIOD. THE SAUDI SUPPORT STARTED ONLY AFTER MENGISTU CAME TO POWER AND IS THEREFORE AIMED AT PURPOSES BROADER THAN THE ERITREAN CAUSE.

6. OGADEN SITUATION AND ETHIOPIAN-SOMALI RELATIONS: MIROG; SHARPLY CONDEMNED THE SOMALIS FOR, IN EFFECT, CONTINUING TO WAGE AN ARMED STRUGGLE AGAINST ETHIOPIA TO REALIZE SOMALI TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS. HE CHARGED THAT THE SOMALI "MILITARY FORMATIONS" FIGHTING IN THE OGADEN ARE FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES "COMMANDO ARMS" OF THE SOMALI ARMY. THESE "MILITARY FORMATIONS" STILL HOLD POCKETS OF TERRITORY IN THE OGADEN. THE SOMALI GOVERNMENT HAS OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED THAT IT SUPPORTS THE WESTERN SOMALI LIBERA-

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TION FRONT'S (WSLF) STRUGGLE. SIAD BARRE PUBLICLY STATED THAT SOMALIA WILL MATERIALLY SUPPORT ITS BRETHREN FIGHTING IN THE OGADEN. WHETHER

THE WEAPONS USED BY THE WSLF WERE LEFT BEHIND OR WHETHER THEY ARE CURRENTLY BEING SHIPPED FROM SOMALI DOES NOT MATTER; IN EFFECT, MOGADISCIO IS ARMING THE RESISTANCE. TO SUPPORT HIS ARGUMENT, MIRONOV REFERRED TO WSLF DOCUMENTS PUBLISHED IN MOGADISCIO WHICH HE SAID OPENLY DESCRIBE WSLF-SOMALI COLLABORATION. HE PREDICTED THAT THE COURSE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE OGADEN FIGHTING AND IN SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN TENSIONS WILL DEPEND HEAVILY ON BARRE'S SUCCESS IN OBTAINING ARMS ABROAD.

7. SOVIET-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS: MIRONOV GENERALLY CONFINED HIS REMARKS TO PLATITUDES APPEARING IN THE SOVIET PRESS ABOUT CLOSE SOVIET-ETHIOPIAN TIES. HE DEFLECTED QUESTIONS ON THE AMOUNT OF SOVIET ECONOMIC AID TO ETHIOPIA AND REFERRED EMBOFF TO DEFENSE MINISTRY FOR INFORMATION ON SOVIET MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN ETHIOPIA. HE SAID THAT THERE ARE BETWEEN FIVE HUNDRED AND ONE THOUSAND NON-MILITARY ETHIOPIAN STUDENTS IN THE SOVIET UNION.

8. COMMENT: IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS, MIRONOV HAS DEMONSTRATED A TENDENCY TO SPREAD OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS. WE SEE THAT SAME TENDENCY IN HIS REMARKS ABOVE, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO A MILITARY SETTLEMENT IN ERITREA AND TO THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH THE PURSUIT OF SUCH A SETTLEMENT HAS CREATED FOR MOSCOW'S RELATIONS WITH ITS ARAB FRIENDS. IN THE CONTEXT OF MIRONOV'S OTHERWISE SANGUINE COMMENTS, HOWEVER, XTEJIND PARTICULARLY INTERESTING HIS

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REMARKS ON SOMALI MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE WSLF IN
THE OGADEN. THESE COMMENTS MAY HAVE BEEN DESIGNED
TO (A) JUSTIFY THE CONTINUED CUBAN TROOP PRESENCE
IN THE REGION AND (B) TO REMIND THE U.S. THAT
SIAD BARRE HAS NOT YET ABANDONED HIS PURSUIT OF
SOMALI TERRITORIAL CLAIMS AND THEREFORE DOES NOT
MEET U.S. POLICY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SUPPLY OF
U.S. ARMS. GARRISON
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TROOP DEPLOYMENT, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 06 sep 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MOSCOW21262
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780998/aaaaddkl.tel
Line Count: 309
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Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 987bfa56-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1532527
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOVIET MFA OFFICIAL DISCUSSES ETHIOPIA SUMMARY: SOVIET MFA ETHIOPIAN DESK OFFICER STATES THAT -- CUBAN PRESENCE IN ETHIOPIA IS NOT LIKELY TO
TAGS: PINT, ET, UR, CU
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/987bfa56-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014